THE MEASURE
A JOURNAL OF POETRY

Sonnets in Quaker Language, by Hildegarde Flanner

Forgive Us Our Debts, by Robert L. Wolf

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Judas

JUDAS smoothed his heavy beard,
Clenched his fingers, made a fist;
He struck a poplar by his side—
The night was angry amethyst.
He saw three crosses on a hill,
He felt the heaving of a throng;
One tree leaned hard against the sky—
And it looked strong.

—*Harold Vinal.*

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Sonnets in Quaker Language

I.

THEE is obscured, beloved, as though I
Beheld thy body through a ghost between.
What death of other lovers, and what cry
Of other deaths and loves here intervene?
Is it thee carries, like old ambergris,
The sweet tenacious presence of the dead,
That, like a wind about us, memory
Disturbs the dust thee once thought buriéd?
Or is it I who veil a wakeful ghost
Within the haunted distance of my eyes,
And am forever the unearthly host
Unto a thing long dead, that never dies?
Thee kiss me through a ghost! and so inter
All past loves in a radiant sepulchre.

II.

Thee sets a bell to swinging in my soul,
And though the sound is nebulous and dark,
Yet musical my thought unto its toll,
And seldom is my hush! and loud my hark!
Thee knows that in response continual
My heart is all ways resonant to thee,
Yet with how dim a sound antiphonal,
Like a lost wind that blows beneath the sea.
Can thee resolve confusion of my tears
Into a single silence of desire?
Can thee, when singing has gone cold with fears,
Put on more music and put on more fire?
If so, then I am cloister to a bell
That utters advent of a miracle.

III.

Spring is the very disenchanted time
When I must tell thee what I do not know,
When thee would summon up my heart to rhyme
Its beating upon yes or upon no.
But all the while I look between thy eyes
And dare not touch the candle of my gaze
Unto the deep fire that within thee lies,
—(Still after death will there be yeas and nays?)—
And all the while desire and yet restrain
Our hands confederate in ecstacy,
And one last moment to evade my pain
Say lightly, "It is Spring to-day....Oh see
How Proserpine beneath her zone discloses
Her April body made of naked roses."

—*Hildegarde Flanner.*

Sleepless Night

I.

ONE thing I know all men would buy,
And some there be who do;
But I like those who turn and sigh
For better ones and new;

Their ways are never soon forgot
Out of my shallow mind,
And I like best what I have not,
As must all womankind.

II.

Upon this night and every other
There will recur against my will
The theme of death that seeks to smother
Immanent strife, and hold me still

Under its nothingness, and under
Peace that was long ago resigned.....
(It is the lips that you may plunder;
Never invade the guarded mind.)

III.

Here I lie hurt, who sought no pain,
But wanted still your gentleness
That was more lovely and more vain
Than this impulsive harsh caress.

Now nightly I shall break your sleep
With words and motions anger-ridden,
Calling aloud how you must reap
The harvest that you sowed unbidden.

—*Bernice Lesbia Kenyon.*

Model

IT was always easy for Jeanette
To wear fine hats with costly gowns, and yet
No easier than when unclothed, she stood
With light and shadow on her womanhood.

Episode

WE saw a man, both rough and fat,
Pick up a lonely forlorn cat
Left in the road near Barnegat.

He tied an iron ring and bar
Wrenched from a schooner's broken spar
Around her neck and flung her far

Beyond the shore. Something in me
Took flame. I ran and turned to see
The cat rise struggling, then shake free

And swim in quickly for the land.
The man walked down across the sand,
A heavy stone in either hand.

I shouted, "Throw the cat a stick,"
And came up quickly, yet not quick
Enough to stop the coward's trick.

"So, will you try to swim?" he said.
"Watch me drop this upon its head."
He struck the cat. She sprawled out dead.

I knocked him clear from out his hat.
He dropped, and well deserved just that
For killing an heroic cat.

—*Prescott Hoard.*

The Riddle

"SHE is laughing," they said.
No! No! She is weeping.
"She is seeing bright visions."
No, no, she is sleeping.
"She is flirting with Life.
Feel the pulse of her breath."
No! No! see her eyes,
She is mating with Death.

Waiting

THE hush of my heart as I wait for him
Is the hush of the night
As she waits for the moon,
And the thrill of my body watching for him
Is the thrill of the white dawn
Watching for noon;
The sweep of my thought is like wind on the hill,
Joy sings like a thrush too sun-drunk to be still.
O moontide and noon tide,
O thrill in the hush
O wind on the hillside
And voice of the thrush,
Call, call him to come,
For Love makes me dumb.

Bird of Prey

HER heart is such a little thing
And quivers at your touch—Oh pause;
Hold it beneath your vulture wing
Before you tear it with your claws.

Her heart is hardly worthy prey—
Too weary, wounded and too weak.
Be generous with long delay
Before you stab it with your beak.

—*Sara Bard Field.*

When I Think

LOVE, when I think how other hands shall give
Into your arms life's sweetest gift, your son,
How in another woman's body live,
Even before our little spring is done,—
The seeds from which this agony is sprung,
I am like one who in the high noon light
With all the earth's ecstatic color wrung,
Is suddenly struck blinder than the night.

Your urgent hands in mine no longer guide,
The yearning of your voice I cannot hear,
Stumbling down the darkness of my pride,
Nothing of all your passion draws me near;
Every kiss you leave upon my breast
Is but reminder where his head should rest.

—*Eda Lou Walton.*

Tristesse

BACCA, thy beauty all was vain,
vain as the lyre that Timon drew,
vain as the azure's changing blue,
vain to this drought as last year's rain:
because the grass of the mountain glade
so soon forgot the imprint made
by that young faun whose form it knew.

Nocturne

BENEATH thy balcony, my love,
each night I take my stand
and sing my love,—as from above
I spy a little hand,
white as a lily, fragile-fair,
upon the lattice shown;
and crowned in unbound raven hair
a little face looks down.

You are to Me

YOU are to me the flower of dawn
that bursts the night's forbidden bars,
and marks a burning pathway on
the fields of silent stars.

You are the love that pensive lies
at our Creation's closest roots:
deeper than lore of all the wise,
sweeter than silver lutes.

—William A. Drake.

Respite

I HUNG a wreath upon my door,
The neighbors cried, "Who's dead?"
I peered out thro the shuttered blind,
"I am, you fools," I said.

"For only thus and only so
Can I ever be alone;
So weep your tears and trim your grief
And make your proper moan.

"Come to my little funeral
And smell the pretty flowers,
And when you leave, in sleek black gloves,
I'll snatch my waited hours."

The undertaker folds the chairs,
The hearse has rolled away;
I wrap myself in solitude,
And there, my dears, I'll stay!

—*Mary Atwater Taylor.*

Who Puts Pride - - -

WHO puts pride in a head
Bowed by a cruel thing,
And a smile on the sad mouth
Lifted up to sing,

Who brings a girl to marriage bed—
Ripens to harvesting
A fallow field ploughed in pain—
Has done a proud thing.

—*Annmary Seccombe.*

Ambush

AT evening in the strange unlighted town
I sought the streets for comfort, turning down
Each covered dusky walk. . . . There was a tree
Whereunder children swung and stared at me.
Some houses slept, with doors and windows locked.
I passed a shallow porch where people rocked;

They whispered. I went on, and met a man
Who trimmed the border where his grass began.
Across a garden, fragrant now and cool,
Three happy puppies played about a pool
Until a boy behind them pushed them in.
The night was sweet as none had ever been. . . .
I turned another way, to go and sleep,
When suddenly a cottage seemed to creep
Close to the walk and wait for me. I looked;
The porch was empty and the screen was hooked;
But, dim within, two ancient women sat,
Motionless, their feet upon a mat.
I could not see an eye; but there were four
That fixed me as I hastened by the door.
Soon I was out of hearing; and I knew
There went no word between them as they grew
Expectant of the next foot that would fall. . . .
I tried forgetting, but my thoughts were all
Of darkness, and a path before a den,
And silent, silent spiders watching men.

—*Mark Van Doren.*

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ACTING EDITOR: GENEVIEVE TAGGARD

Forgive Us Our Debts

A RICH and interesting literary age does not usually come across the threshold tagged and labelled.

No meteors flashed in the skies in 1584 when Shakespeare entered London, and January 1, 1817, the year of Keats' first volume, was probably much like January 1, 1816—wet and cold and snowy.

Nevertheless a birthday or two has come to be one of the accepted marks of legitimacy; and on the whole 1912 has perhaps the best claim to have initiated the present astonishingly busy literary revival in America. For in that year, a certain Reverend Mr. Earle, who had attained considerable notoriety for an escapade which nowadays would pass without notice, brought out his anthology *The Lyric Year.*

I have not a copy of this little book here—it is now a rare volume—and poets in future times, good, bad, and indifferent, will no doubt find much secret comfort in the fact that it is now a rare volume because it published *Renascence,* which received neither first, second, nor third place in the judges' distribution of awards. Mr. Earle, indeed, did give his vote for first prize to this poem, but the redoubtable Mr. William Stanley Braithwaite, who drew the inspiration for his own annual from this anthology, achieved a glorious immortality, and set the precedent from which he has

never since faltered, by omitting it altogether from his roll of merit. Thus unheralded, behind a smoke-screen as it were—"the new society in the shell of the old," as the Wobbly philosophy would put it —there stole upon us a school of lyric poetry finer in its literary quality than anything else America had ever hitherto produced—a school of poetry that has already added one unquestioned classic to the great line of English poets, and promises, before it dies out, to leave at least three or four others.

There was plenty of smoke-screen. In the same year that Mr. Earle's anthology appeared, Harriet Monroe founded *Poetry* (Chicago), and thenceforward for a long time the camouflage was more in evidence than the poets. It is not my purpose here to speak ill of the dead, and in any case, we owe a considerable debt of gratitude to the free-verse school of poets. If they will never be read in the future, at least they will be securely enshrined in Ph.D. theses—they have earned an undoubted right to the sacred honor of historical importance.

In fact, nothing less devastating than that nine-year epidemic would have cleared the American field of the pallid and rickety survivors of the echoes of Victorian verse. I do not mean these remarks in derogation of the free-verse movement. I think, indeed, that it accomplished precisely what it set out to accomplish. It was from the first a propagandist, rather than a creative movement—to do it justice, it never pretended to be occupied with the creation of memorable beauty, but rather with the destruction of the false values then so much in prevalence—with the achievement of freedom, rather than with its exercise. This it did. If it did not free its disciples—if for them it merely substituted one set of pedantries for another; a new series of clichés for the old ones, it at least set free those who were to follow in its footsteps. And this was merely inevitable. Poetry, after all, is the gift of God; and it was no more possible for—well, you may supply your own list of names—to be a poet, than it is possible for the ordinary man to add a cubit to his stature.

But turning again to Miss Millay for illustration, it is at least doubtful that such fine-strung and compelling lyrics as

CHORUS

Give away her gowns,
Give away her shoes;

She has no more use
For her fragrant gowns;
Take them all down,
Blue, green, blue,
Lilac, pink, blue,
From their padded hangers;
She will dance no more
In her narrow shoes;
Sweep her narrow shoes
From the closet floor.

or

ASSAULT

I

I had forgotten how the frogs must sound
After a year of silence, else I think
I should not so have ventured forth alone
At dusk upon this unfrequented road.

II

I am waylaid by Beauty. Who will walk
Between me and the crying of the frogs?
Oh, savage Beauty, suffer me to pass,
That am a timid woman, on her way
From one house to another!

would ever have been written, except for the free-verse emphasis on simple speech and rhythms. While in two such dissimilar poems as Genevieve Taggard's *Ice Age* and Wallace Stevens' *Peter Quince at the Clavier,* the free-verse movement shows signs of blossoming into that development which Conrad Aiken long ago predicted for it, with a rhythm definite, inevitable, inescapable—using all the devices of rhyme and meter of the most Tennysonian verse—and yet of a fascinating and most seductive irregularity.

In 1921, the American poetry movement entered on a new stage —the good seed came into the open and began to bear a hundredfold, and the rest withered away in the accompanying sunlight. In the spring of that year the *Measure* was founded—during the same months Miss Millay achieved prominence with *Figs from Thistles;* in the fall, Elinor Wylie published her first volume. The *Measure* has recently been branded by one of its own editors as an organ of faithful and unwavering mediocrity, and I, an outsider, would be the last to dispute this claim; nevertheless, it may in some degree divide with Miss Millay the credit for the contemporary change

of poetic direction. The *Measure* was as much as anything, I suppose, a protest against the sterility of *Poetry,* and if it accomplished nothing else, it at least succeeded in converting its rival. I collected no statistics at the time, and perhaps Miss Monroe will rise to controvert me with indignant and Olympian polemics, but it at least seemed as though the proportion of what except between 1912 and 1921 has been known as poetry, underwent a sudden increase in the pages of her magazine. Certainly, as one of the editors of the *Nation* informs me, in their first contest conducted at about that time, free-verse composed about eighty-five per cent of the contributions, and metrical about fifteen—since then, although the *Nation* has not favored either form at the expense of the other, these proportions have steadily changed until they stand almost reversed.

But here I am laboriously proving the obvious. Amy Lowell has already preached the funeral oration of the free-verse movement in a recent issue of the *New Republic*—Alfred Kreymborg, seeing at least two years ago which way the wind blew, had begun to write sonnets.

Now this is far from saying that there is any necessary gain in the mere change from free-verse to quatrains, couplets, or sonnets. *Assault,* which I quoted above, is a fine poem—I do not know whether it is free-verse or not—the distressingly ubiquitous stanzas of Bynner and Untermeyer are not poems at all, though they have all the external earmarks. The free-verse movement has come and gone, and its net result is that poetry is what poetry was—but that does not prove free-verse impossible. The reason the 1912-1921 poets failed, is, as I said before, and as they themselves have said so often, that they were concerned not with art but with propaganda—they were interested in the exploration of new fields, rather than with their cultivation. Frost and Robinson, who stem from Browning, have produced almost as little poetry worth cherishing as Sandburg who stems from Whitman. Masters, who represents an even balder appropriation of Browning for the American scene, has produced none whatever. The obvious futility of the second *Spoon River* series, lately appearing in *Vanity Fair,* is not different from the impression the earlier work would create, if it came out today. And yet Masters, I suppose, shares with *Ethan Frome* and Dreiser, the responsibility for modern American realistic fiction.

Wherever these poets have left a memorable phrase embodied, as in *Flammonde,* as in *The Congo,* as in *The Road Not Taken* or *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening,* as perhaps in *Cool Tombs* and *Fog,* their work will be preserved a hundred years hence in the anthologies. But mere richness of material never saved anyone from oblivion. There were *Agamemnons* before Aeschylus, and blank-verse tragedies of *Hamlet* before Shakespeare. There have been *Odes to a Nightingale* since Keats. The reason we remember these particular works is that we cannot help it—they not only had something to say, but they said it in unforgettable fashion.

This is especially necessary to consider when we come to the fountain head and source of the entire free-verse movement, the works of Whitman. At a party a few months ago, I for the first time heard two young poets (one of whom was myself) express some doubts of the permanent value of Walt Whitman. It was, as Darwin says of his first suspicion of the mutability of species, like confessing a murder. I do not know whether or not Mr. Ficke desires to share with me the public obloquy of this dreadful deed, but the thing has to be said, and the quicker it is said the better. I sometimes think that it needs only to be shouted aloud to become universal, as with Hans Christian Andersen's child who saw that the king had no clothes on. The truth is that the free-verse movement is a result of the popularity of Whitman, and the popularity of Whitman is a result of what he had to say, and not how he said it. That is all very fine, and very necessary, and Whitman should be canonized among the obscure literary saints, but it constitutes no patent of immortality. Darwin is also an important person in intellectual history, but no one born after 1880 reads the *Origin of Species* today, because it is dull and unreadable. No one will read Whitman, when he becomes *vieux jeu,* and *vieux jeu* to the present generation he is rapidly becoming. The generation that adored him was the one that most needed his message of emancipation; they were the last wavering remnants of Puritanism, and they imbibed about as much of Whitman's spirit as the average Episcopal bishop does of Christ's. Mention sex or revolutionary democracy in anything but Whitman's precise words, and it will be the very Whitmaniacs who fall upon you and slay you. But the generation of modern young experiencers who have unconsciously inherited Whitman's tradition

find him as tedious as any other garrulous grandfather—and none the less so that they owe him their own blood. So go the cruel facts of life—if you wish veneration you must not merely deserve it, you must continuously evoke it, and that Whitman cannot do. It was in the very nature of his message—so new to him, and so exciting—that he should hurry to get it down without much caring how. And the consequence is that it will be incorporated and preserved in the gradual change of morals of the race, rather than in the words in which he himself expressed it. Its poetry will be written by those who take its point of view for granted, rather than by those to whom it is a strained and vociferous bit of news.

This is sufficiently just. Mere magic, like that of our cherished Miss Millay, again, so much of whose best work found a refuge only in *Ainslee's,* can escape contemporary notice, where pretentiousness and clamor—the roll-up-my-sleeves-and-see-me-do-it manner, such as that of Sandburg, or Bodenheim, or Mencken, or this article, always draws a certain amount of attention. But in the long run magic has its way, and the other things are forgotten. The free-verse movement is already a matter of history—interesting history, to be sure, but as literary matters go, ancient none the less. We have praised its decaying Caesars long enough—it is time to bury them impolitely and get them out of the way. Their ghosts still haunt the scene, and vengeful ghosts they are, as John Gould Fletcher's review of Miss Bogan in a recent *Freeman* proves. Perhaps if we fall on our knees thrice daily, and facing to the middle-west, say in chorus "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors," we shall feel entitled to proceed forward with our own work. But in any case, we must leave these shades to dispose of one another. The modern motif is "Move on!"

—*Robert L. Wolf.*

ANNOUNCEMENT

CAROLYN HALL has resigned from the active board of the *Measure,* and ELINOR WYLIE has been elected.

CONTRIBUTORS

HILDEGARDE FLANNER, author of *Young Girl,* will bring out a second book as one of a series of *Flights,* published in San Francisco, by Leon Gelber. Of her experiment in Quaker Language, Miss Flanner writes:

> "I am interested in employing it in poetry, for I find in it something so simple, musical and direct. There are people enough who will object, and perhaps on the ground that the subject matter is not what we think of as 'Quaker.' Certainly it is not an idiom to employ indiscriminately. But for certain kinds of poetry, certain moods, I think it authentic."

It is interesting to note that the outcast *thou* and *thee,* which have been in the years just past the earmark of all that was false and derived in poetry, are creeping back into contemporary usage again. E. E. Cummings' *Tulips and Chimneys,* which will be reviewed in the July *Measure,* is perhaps the best immediate example of the genuine music that can be drawn from the older pronoun.

SARAH BARD FIELD, a member of the brilliant Eugene Field family, well known as a leader among radicals and feminists, and chosen at the first convention of the Women's Party to make the presentation speech to Congress when the bust of Susan B. Anthony was unveiled, has published poetry at infrequent intervals for many years. Her book, *The Windy Hour* will be brought out in the near future. She is at present living in Italy.

MARK VAN DOREN, perhaps the most trustworthy of the younger critics, has recently emerged as a poet of reserved and supple power. A volume of his poetry will be published this fall by Thomas Seltzer.

WILLIAM A. DRAKE is well known as an editor and reviewer.

ROBERT L. WOLF is author of *After Disillusion.*

HAROLD VINAL has gone to France and will visit England and Italy before his return in September.

BERNICE LESBIA KENYON is on the staff of *Scribner's Magazine,* and is the author of *Songs of Unrest* and several plays.

PRESCOTT HOARD writes that he 'lives in New York and works in a railroad office.'

MARY ATWATER TAYLOR (Mrs. Henry Taylor) edited during her senior year the Vassar *Miscellany.* She has since studied in Germany, and is now living in New York.

EDA LOU WALTON lives down her Ph. D. degree and her position as head of the Department of English at a large high-school in California, by writing original and subtle poetry. She is perhaps best known for her translations from the Navajo and Blackfeet Indians.

ANNMARY SECCOMBE was born in England and is now living in Peterborough, New Hampshire. For a time she was a dancer in New York.

During the month of June, manuscripts may be sent to Miss Taggard at New Preston, Connecticut.

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